

# Some Remarks on the Late Antique and Early Medieval Capitals from the Eastern Adriatic Coast

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## **Abstract:**

The paper discusses several capitals from the eastern Adriatic coast that belong to church furnishings and architectural sculpture. A group of the discussed marble smaller capitals can be dated to the end of Late Antiquity while others belong to the Early Middle Ages. The capitals of church furnishings included in the paper originate mostly from the Kvarner islands. They are very interesting in terms of typology and style. As regards the large church-architecture capitals, the paper contains only some observations on them.

Given the important role of capitals as elements of architectural sculpture and church furnishings in the Late Antique, pre-Romanesque and early-Romanesque periods in Europe, the elaboration of individual capitals in this paper aims to contribute to more extensive knowledge of the Croatian monuments.

**Key words:** capitals, architectural sculpture, church furnishings, Dalmatia, Kvarner islands, Late Antiquity, Early Middle Ages

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On the eastern Adriatic coast, the early pre-Romanesque period lasted approximately from the later 7<sup>th</sup> to the mid-9<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> This is the period when stone sculptures with interlacing-ribbon pattern appeared, while a number of new churches were built in the late 8<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. What characterizes this period in Byzantine Dalmatia and early medieval Croatia is the lack of accurate, inscription-based monument dating.<sup>2</sup> This is why the style and workshop characteristics and contexts of finds are particularly important for studying numerous early pre-Romanesque monuments. These general determinants can be applied to the pre-Romanesque capital-related problems to which this paper is dedicated.

After Antiquity, during the pre-Romanesque period, the production of monumental capitals of church colonnades on the eastern Adriatic coast was very modest. However, the individual specimens of monumental capitals, together with a large number of small capitals belonging to church furnishings, allow us to discuss the subject. We should point out here that many small capitals belonging to church furnishings were published and somewhat systematized in P. Vežić's synthesis of Istrian and Dalmatian ciboria and in the works of other authors on early pre-Romanesque stonemason's workshops and church furnishings at particular sites.<sup>3</sup> Thus, while they may not have a prominent place as a separate object of study, Croatia's pre-Romanesque capitals have been published and interpreted in the works dealing with particular groups of early medieval monuments.

- 1 In Early Medieval Croatia and Dalmatia, the period until the mid-9<sup>th</sup> century is seen as the initial period in the development of the pre-Romanesque art, when some masterpieces of the Early Medieval architecture (like St. Donat's Church, in many aspects similar to the early central structures in the Carolingian and Byzantine worlds) were built.
- 2 In the territory of Byzantine Dalmatia outside the present-day Croatia (Kotor), early monuments are found containing inscriptions that help in their dating. The first confirmed ruler's inscription found in Croatian territory is the one of Duke Trpimir. A very important workshop that was active during his reign marked the beginning of the high pre-Romanesque period in Dalmatia. Cf. Rapanić, *Predromaničko doba u Dalmaciji*, 185. Željko Rapanić mentions the gable with Trpimir's name as the first accurately dated pre-Romanesque monument, making a clear distinction between the early and high pre-Romanesque periods in his discussions on the development of the pre-Romanesque period.
- 3 For the ciboria, cf. Vežić and Lončar, *Hoc tigmen*, passim. For the church furnishings cf. e.g. Jakšić, "Majstor koljanskog pluteja," 243-252; Jakšić, "Croatian Art," 41-54; Jakšić, "Reljevi trogirске klesarske radionice," 265-285; Burić, "Kameni namještaj," 165-181; Šeparović, "Katalog ranosrednjovjekovne skulpture," 181-185. An interesting group of early pre-Romanesque monumental capitals originates from the Church of St. Mary the Great near Bale in Istria. To the best of my knowledge, this is the largest group of such capitals on Croatia's Adriatic coast. The St. Mary the Great capitals were published and interpreted in a series of works by Miljenko Jurković. Of these, cf. Jurković, "Le Maître," 349-360; Jurković, Chevalier and Matejčić, *Velika Gospa* (Vol. II), 88-101.

Roman capitals in general – both those from the earlier Empire and those from the Byzantine period – had a visible influence on the development of the early medieval sculpture. In the regions that had once belonged to the Byzantine world, like Italy and Dalmatia, the Byzantine component was probably more significant for the development of the early medieval sculpture because the final phase of the Late Antiquity stonemasonry (the 6<sup>th</sup> and early 7<sup>th</sup> centuries) was primarily Byzantine in its nature, characterized by the imported marble sculptures made in Byzantine workshops and by local imitations of Byzantine prototypes. The 6<sup>th</sup> century Byzantine capitals represented the general legacy a later phase of the early medieval development could rely on.<sup>4</sup> That development could have also been determined by the influences from the early medieval “Carolingian” circle, and elements from both circles could be discerned in the capitals analysed in this article.

## Reused Roman capitals in the early medieval churches

In the pre-Romanesque architecture on the eastern Adriatic coast, columns with capitals were usually omitted. This must be the reason why monumental capitals belonging to the pre-Romanesque period are only sporadic. On the other hand, the early Romanesque architecture, dominated by simple basilicas with columns, enabled the fruitful development of the shapes of early Romanesque capitals, with their basic characteristics reasonably defined and presented.<sup>5</sup> In early medieval architecture of both pre-Romanesque and early-Romanesque style, the reused Roman capitals occasionally appeared. Some examples from Zadar can illustrate this.

The capitals in St. Donat’s Church in Zadar (Fig. 1) are reused Roman specimens. They exhibit the practice of reusing old Roman capitals – typical of early Christian churches and continued in Middle Ages.<sup>6</sup> The composite capitals in St. Donat’s Church originate from the Roman Imperial period. They are not the only example

4 A striking Byzantine influence is noticeable in the most important group of early pre-Romanesque monumental capitals known on the eastern Adriatic coast so far – the one in the Church of St. Mary the Great in Istria (cf. the papers mentioned in Footnote 3). As the said site has been published in detail, the capitals will not be additionally covered in this article. However, they do indicate the importance of studying of pre-Romanesque capitals and suggest that new discoveries may be expected, both in Istria and in Dalmatia, including early medieval Croatian territory.

5 Jakšić, “Tipologija kapitela,” 203-215.

6 This phenomenon is typical of the early Christian and early medieval architecture in general. For individual examples see, for example, Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, or Jäggi, *San Salvatore in Spoleto*.

of Roman capitals reused in early medieval churches in Zadar. Well-known examples include the Church of St. Peter the Old, early Romanesque Benedictine basilica of St. Mary, and (also early Romanesque) St. Lawrence's Church.



Fig. 1 St. Donat in Zadar, interior. Borrowed from: Vladimir P. Goss, *Predromanička arhitektura u Hrvatskoj* (Zagreb: Art studio Azinović, 2006), 98.

Standing out among other Roman fragments used for St. Peter the Old is the capital applied on the round column next to the apse of St. Andrew's Church. The capital is of Corinthian type, decorated with acanthus leaves. The original paper where it was published does not specify the possible origins of the capital or its dating.<sup>7</sup> It seems that the builders of the early medieval church did not really plan the reuse of old Roman capitals, because the other spolia in the church make a very colourful impression, suitable for a pre-Romanesque building. In the two early Romanesque churches everything is much more in harmony. A damaged Roman marble capital in the Benedictine church of St. Mary was purposefully placed next to the newer, early Romanesque capitals, indicating the interest of the early Romanesque stonemasons.<sup>8</sup> In St. Law-

7 Petricioli and Vučenović, "Crkve sv. Andrija i sv. Petar Stari," 177-202.

8 Jakšić, "Tipologija kapitela," 208; Vežić, *Zadar na pragu kršćanstva*, 73-74.

rence's Church, two capitals with acanthus leaves are Roman and the other two, with a palmette motif, are early medieval.<sup>9</sup> The four of them together constitute a harmonious unity.

These best known examples of using Roman capitals in early medieval churches in Zadar are of general importance, and together with examples from other towns demonstrate an eastern Adriatic practice that was widespread in the early medieval period. St. Donat's Church in Zadar contains the best known Dalmatian example of a re-dressed Roman capital. The example is so striking that it could have a special place even among the examples of subsequent alterations on Roman capitals outside Croatia. Given the relevance of the monuments in St. Donat's Church, the literature has paid substantial attention to the composite capital in the church's gallery (Fig. 2), on which Roman ornaments in its upper part have been preserved and the leaf-wreaths in its lower part have been re-dressed more or less in accordance with the abstract pre-Romanesque principles.<sup>10</sup> Comparing the newer, pre-Romanesque motifs on the capital with the similar motifs on more accurately dated works (the capital and acroterium of the hexagonal ciborium from Biskupija - Crkvina) helps us date the re-dressed capital to the first half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to many other observations, it is an important basis for dating the construction of the gallery of St. Donat's Church to the early decades of the 9<sup>th</sup> century.



Fig. 2 St. Donat in Zadar, redressed capital. Borrowed from: Tomislav Marasović, *Dalmatia praeromanica* (Split, Zagreb: Književni krug, 2008), 356.

9 Jakšić, "Tipologija kapitela," 213-214.

10 For this capital, see for example Jakšić, "Tipologija kapitela," 205; Vežić, *Sveti Donat*.

## Church-furnishing capitals and their dating

Numerous small church-furnishing capitals that have been published help us study the basic typological characteristics of the pre-Romanesque capitals that belonged to church furnishings. The ciborium capitals, dated to an earlier pre-Romanesque period, are generally beautifully shaped and have neatly arranged ornamental motifs. For a more complete insight, the texts on specimens from particular sites should be compared.<sup>11</sup> In principle, the capitals retain the classical arrangement of ornaments with strips of leaves on the main part and with volutes on the upper part. Besides the smooth leaves, other popular forms are the palmettes. Small triple-interlaced arcades and other geometrical patterns can also be found. A small spiral-fluted column with volutes is often seen on the upper part.

The altar screen capitals are also divided on the leaf zone and the upper part with volutes. They often contain either the popular palmette motif or carved smooth leaves.<sup>12</sup> Pre-Romanesque capitals differ from the early Romanesque ones by their style. More accurate differentiation between various pre-Romanesque capitals and separation of those dated to earlier periods is usually based on comparative analyses of capitals from different sites and an insight into the contexts of the finds.

In this paper several very specific church-furnishing capitals will demonstrate a close connection with antique prototypes on the one side, and completely new features on the other. A group of marble capitals from different sites has been differently dated in the literature. The capital from the island of Pag causes difficulties regarding its precise dating. Other capitals analysed in the paper are certainly medieval, but with unique features. Among the numerous other capitals there are many interesting examples, and the chosen ones could only testify to this interesting group of stone monuments that should be further investigated. A complete picture could only be made after systematic publishing of all of the finds.

11 Vežić and Lončar, *Hoc tighen*, passim, with literature for particular ciboria.

12 Compare, for example, the small palmette capitals from Cista Velika near Imotski; Gudelj, *Crkvine – Cista Velika*, 24, 30. Numerous small capitals from the very important locality Biskupija – Crkvina have been covered in the unpublished doctoral thesis by Jurčević, "Arhitektura i skulptura," passim. The capitals made in different early medieval workshops have their distinguishing features. Capitals of two important ciboria from the same locality have been published and discussed in the literature, of which see Vežić and Lončar, *Hoc tighen*, 59-63, 101-104. The capitals of the Biskupija-Crkvina baptismal ciborium are similar to some examples from Italy.



*Data on the chosen examples of capitals*

Although there are many interesting specimens of church-furnishing capitals from the eastern Adriatic coast, this paper will only discuss a small number of them. The capitals – with the exception of the example from Pag – were already published, but they deserve additional comments. That is particularly evident in the case of marble capitals from the islands of Krk and Cres and town of Pula. The most significant among these capitals are the two examples from Krk.



Fig. 3 Košljun, Franciscan Monastery Collection. Cubical capital with monogram. Photo by M. Jarak.

Because of their form, ornaments and the stone they are made of, a special place is reserved for the small capitals from the collection of the Franciscan Monastery on the islet of Košljun on the island of Krk.<sup>13</sup> The collection includes two marble capitals, both with the first segments of columns (Fig. 3, 4). The capitals are cubical, with slightly narrowed lower third, approx. 27cm high. A monogram on one

13 Frane Bulić wrote about the capitals in "Iscrizioni di Petrus Arcivescovo di Salona," 157-158; Karaman, "O spomenicima VII. i VIII. st. u Dalmaciji," 102-103. Among recent mentions of the marble capitals see Jarak, "On the origin of early Christian sculpture," 1559.

side is a distinguishing feature of both of them. Both have identical monograms, located on the upper part of the side. Above the monogram there is a zigzag motif. Under it is a plant motif of a trefoil and palmette, respectively. On the remaining sides of both capitals a single line of stylized acanthus leaves extends under the upper marginal zigzag ornament. The leaves are markedly elongated and narrow, and their upper parts end with a horizontal geometrical pattern. A double pronounced moulding separates each capital from its column. The stylized plant motifs are an obvious echo of the classical capitals with acanthus leaves.



Fig. 4 Košljun, Franciscan Monastery Collection. Cubical capital with monogram. Photo by M. Jarak.

A small marble capital on the island of Cres has an identical style (Fig. 5). The capital was noticed and published by B. Fučić.<sup>14</sup> Together with the column, this small capital is today embedded in front of a house in the town of Cres, in the immediate vicinity of the Romanesque St. Isidore's Church. Hence the idea that the capital could have been associated with some earlier, unknown phase of the church. The Cres capital differs from the Košljun ones by the fact

14 Fučić, "Izveštaj o putu," 48-49.



that it contains no monogram. The decorative motifs are the same: the marked zigzag motif on the upper margin and the stylized acanthus leaves on the main side. The Cres capital is not fully preserved – its lower third is cut off, so the plant ornaments are incomplete and the marginal strip is missing.



Fig. 5 Cres, cubical capital in secondary use. Photo by M. Jarak.

It is beyond doubt that the above described marble capitals were made in the same workshop. The existence of identical capitals in Pula was mentioned in literature long ago.<sup>15</sup> However, no evidence of a possible connection between these capitals and any Pula church has been found. Until recently they were exhibited in the Franciscan monastery, and now they are kept in the depot of the Archaeological Museum. The Pula capitals are also small, made of marble and were produced together with a small column from which they are separated with a double pronounced moulding. According to the records of the Archaeological Museum, three similar marble capitals have been preserved.<sup>16</sup> One of them has identical decorations to the ones from Košljun, the only difference being that none of the

15 Cf. in Fučić under the preceding footnote. Raffaele Cattaneo shows his familiarity with the subject; Cattaneo, *L'architettura in Italia*, 98. In the recent synthesis, Ruth Meyer published a photograph of the three Pula capitals; Meyer, *Frühmittelalterliche Kapitelle*, 730, Fig. 2.

16 Data about the Pula capitals are presented here courtesy of Ms. Fina Juroš-Monfardin from AMI, who kindly sent me the related photographs.

Pula specimens have monograms. In addition to the typical motifs on the Kvarner capitals, the two remaining Pula capitals also have plant motifs. Between the marginal zigzag zone and the main ornament, these capitals have a single tendril with small ivy leaves (Fig. 6), and the plant motif on the main side of one of them is also somewhat different. However, there is no doubt that all these capitals (from both Kvarner and Pula) were made in the same workshop and in the same period. Their dating is still questionable. Based on the existence of very similar capitals outside Croatia, they can perhaps be dated to the 8<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>17</sup> For instance, very similar capitals from the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century are known in Fulda and Mettlach. They are very similarly shaped and exhibit a close connection to our capitals, despite the fact that their decorative motifs are different. In the earlier literature, the authors who mostly wrote about the Košljun capitals with monograms dated them between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries. Frane Bulić dated the capitals to the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, in the last period of Antiquity, while Karaman, drawing upon Cattane's work, dated them to the 8<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>18</sup> Both Frane Bulić and Ljubo Karaman thought that the monogram represented the name of a bishop or some other donor of the church the capitals belonged to. The name was interpreted as Andrew, which would indicate a bishop (most likely, although other high-ranking dignitaries cannot be ruled out) who took an active part in arrangement of a church. It is not certain that the church in question was St. Andrew's Church in Punat, because the name contained in the monogram is not a saint's name. There are no reliable data to end further debates on the original positions of the capitals. It seems that the preserved examples were manufactured for different churches,<sup>19</sup> most likely as elements of altar screens.<sup>19</sup> Since it is almost certain that the workshop was in Pula, the existence of the finely carved marble capitals indicates that the Pula stonemasons continued with excellent work at the end of Late Antiquity, or even during the early medieval period. For the exact dating similarly decorated examples of capitals from the hinterland of Dalmatia, which have been again discussed in recent literature, could provide some support. The capitals have been known from a greater number of buildings (church architecture) in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although some of them are very similar to the examples from the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries in Italy, it is probably that similar forms and

17 Meyer, *Frühmittelalterliche Kapitelle*, 116-117, 124-128, 275-277.

18 See note 13.

19 To my knowledge, seven similar marble capitals are known so far: on the island of Cres there used to be another marble capital besides the existing one; unfortunately, it was destroyed.

decorations were applied during a longer period, from the 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> centuries. As such, the monuments from different territories could be differently dated, in accordance with broader historical context. In Dalmatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina the general circumstances speak in favour of the Late Antique origin of the church furnishings, including the capitals in question.<sup>20</sup>



Fig. 6 Pula, AMI depot, cubical capital. Photo from AMI Archives.

The capital from Novalja, of markedly classical traits, could perhaps be included in the group of possible early pre-Romanesque capitals. It is a smaller capital from an unknown original context (Fig. 7). Although it could belong to the final period of Late Antiquity, it might just as well be the product of the early medieval stonemasons who imitated classical models.

20 In favor of Late Antique origin of the sculpture associated with the church buildings recently wrote Nenad Cambi (*Vernakularna umjetnost*, passim). Different opinion, of the Early Medieval origin of the sculptured works, expressed Ante Milošević (*Predromanički zvonici*, 120-133).



Fig. 7 Novalja on island of Pag. Capital with acanthus. Photo by M. Jarak.

The capital is kept in the Stomorica Collection in Novalja on the island of Pag. It is small in size, 22cm high. The diameter of the capital's lower surface is 14cm. That plane has a hole intended for fixing the capital. Obviously, it was an altar screen capital or a ciborium capital. It is decorated with a strip of shallow carved leaves in its lower part. These are beautifully shaped acanthus leaves with their tips curled outwards. Above the acanthus, instead of volutes, a line of small leaves extends from the centre to the corners. The abacus is merely indicated with a slight moulding. There is a very pronounced multi-petalled flower in the centre. The capital boasts harmony and fine workmanship. The decorative line of tiny leaves could perhaps indicate that the capital belongs to early medieval period – maybe the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> or the early 9<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>21</sup> Searching for possible analogies in terms of style and motifs, I could mention perfectly carved capitals of the famous ciborium from Cividale

21 I am not familiar with any direct analogy for this capital. As the line of leaves could perhaps be associated with a similar ornament on pre-Romanesque monuments (plutei, pilasters, ciboria), we could presume that the monument could be dated to the early medieval period. Even more accurately, the capital could be associated with the ciborium fragments from Novalja, where a similar motif of small leaves can be found. Small leaves also appear on early-Romanesque monuments, of which the capitals in particular stand out.

dated to the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>22</sup> The capitals are decorated with two rows of naturally shaped acanthus leaves, with volutes at the upper part. They have a very prominent flower in the middle of the abacus. The similarities with the Novalja capital can be seen in the main motif of acanthus and in the prominent abacus flower. Besides elements which point to the possible dating in the early pre-Romanesque period, the Novalja capital could be seen as an early Romanesque work, which could be supported by the harmony of all the decorative motifs and general look of the capital.<sup>23</sup>

Among the securely dated early medieval capitals, some specific examples are included in this paper that have already been published. One of the capitals is preserved in Tusculum in Solin. Recent studies have drawn attention to the capitals in the Tusculum area,<sup>24</sup> and a possible early medieval origin has been proposed for some of them. Dating particular capitals with high precision is particularly difficult and, despite the possibility that some of them were made in the early medieval period, the data for such dating are not always reliable. In the case of the example selected here, its early medieval origin is obvious, but more precise dating requires additional discussion. The capital probably originates from the belltower of the Split Cathedral, what was its secondary location. The spolia in the belltower of the Split Cathedral (where the Solin – Tusculum capitals come from) certainly included early medieval fragments, among which could have been capitals from different primary locations.<sup>25</sup>

The selected early medieval capital from Tusculum was separately analysed in a recent study.<sup>26</sup> Together with its column and base, the capital is installed on one side of the entrance door of the Tusculum building (Fig. 8). The capital itself is 31cm high and has a square-shaped upper part. Its lower part is bevelled. One of its sides cannot be seen and two of them are partly visible and damaged. The capital has two different, distinctly separated zones. The bottom zone (which is higher) contains well-defined leaves arranged in a single

22 Cf. Tagliaferri, *Le Diocesi di Aquileia e Grado*, T. LXXXVIII.

23 Cf. capitals from Martinići dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> century in Vežić and Lončar, *Hoc tigramen*, 143.

24 Milošević, *Predromanički zvonici*, 155-158; Piteša, *Ranosrednjovjekovni kameni spomenici*, 26-29. Earlier coverage of the medieval capitals in Tusculum can be found in Babić, "Zapažanja o zvoniku splitske katedrale," 145-170. Some fundamental insight into the medieval capitals as spolia in the Split Cathedral belltower can be found in the older literature. For the capital's typological characteristics and their position on the bell-tower, cf. particularly Kečkemet, "Dekoratívna skulptúra," 203-216.

25 Ante Milošević recently has researched into possible early medieval capitals from the Split belltower. Cf. Milošević, *Predromanički zvonici*, 155-158.

26 Piteša, *Ranosrednjovjekovni kameni spomenici*, 28-29.



line. The leaves have a pronounced central rib and small, transversal ribs. Their shape is closer to that of a palmette than of the classical acanthus. Triple-stranded V-motifs can be seen between the tips of the leaves. This bottom zone of the capital is separated from the upper zone with a thin, embossed rib. A prominent cantilever can be seen in the centre of the upper zone. It consists of six well-defined, interconnected globules. It is flanked with stylized capitals with pronounced helixes.



Fig. 8 Capital next to entrance door of Tusculum building, Solin. Photo by M. Jarak.

All these decorations and their pattern have pre-Romanesque characteristics. Although they are symmetrical, the very selection and shape of these decorations is flexible and indicates a pre-Romanesque work. The pronounced leaves in the lower part correspond with the also very pronounced central motif with the globules. The V-ribbons between the leaves are shallow carved and so are the stylized capitals with helixes in the capital's upper part.

The capital is rather large, but smaller than the monumental ones belonging to naves. It probably belonged to church furnishings. While describing it in his new catalogue, A. Piteša notes that its origin is not certain. Maybe it comes from the cathedral belltower, but we do not know this for a fact. When he proposed that it be dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, Piteša probably followed the similarity between the capital's lower part with leaves and the shape of the leaves on the St. Nicholas' Church capitals in Split, the interrelatedness with which has been noticed and emphasized. However, apart from the shape of their palmette leaves, these capitals are different in everything else



and do not necessarily belong to the same period. The small capital from Tusculum, with very typical pre-Romanesque decorations of the abacus and with a somewhat realistic plant motif on its main side, could belong to an earlier pre-Romanesque period. Interestingly, the capital was noticed and published by R. Kautzsch long ago.<sup>27</sup> He dated it to the period of the barbarization of capitals, from the 7<sup>th</sup> century on.<sup>28</sup>

While dating of the capitals that, in terms of their shape and decorations, follow the classical Roman prototypes faces difficulties and opposed opinions, markedly non-classical capitals with very specific style enable much more reliable dating and style classification. Typical in this respect are some capitals from Osor, which are discussed below.

During the excavations carried out in the old St. Mary-at-the-Graveyard Cathedral in Osor, a few capitals were discovered. Without detailed comments, specimens with marked early medieval traits were published by Branko Fučić, who had carried out the excavations at the site.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, no detailed analysis was required for the basic dating of the capitals by B. Fučić. By their morphology and decorative motifs, the capitals certainly belong to an early pre-Romanesque period, probably the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Two of the capitals from Fučić's paper are of a small size and have a markedly rectangular form. Together with one capital, the first segment of the small column on which it was carved has been preserved. By all appearances, these capitals belonged to an altar screen. The third capital is large and has a different shape. It must have belonged to the partition elements of the church's interior or to the architectural sculpture within the very complicated architectural complex of the Bishop's seat in Osor.<sup>30</sup>

The altar rail capitals are particularly interesting. The one with the preserved first segment of a column is approx. 25cm high and 17cm wide. One of its sides is rather worn, and no decorations have been preserved. Decorations are also missing on another side, which was probably polished. The best preserved side is the one with the motif of a cross (Fig. 9). Its lower part has a double moulding

27 Kautzsch, *Kapitellstudien*, T. 49, Nr. 842.

28 Kautzsch, *Kapitellstudien*, 234-235.

29 Fučić, *Stara katedrala sv. Marije*, 10-13 (Fig. 9-12).

30 We are still improving our knowledge of the architecture of the structures of the episcopal complex in Osor, owing to the archaeological excavations carried out in recent years. For more on the latest insights, see Čaušević, "Sainte-Marie du cimetière d'Osor," 205-212; Čaušević-Bully and Čus-Rukonić, "La topographie archéologique d'Osor," 253-270.

that separates the capital from the small column. The upper margin (abacus) is indicated with a single circle – a rosette – in the centre. A shallow carved cross stretches across the entire side, between the above-mentioned margin details. The arms of the cross have marked pronged ends and all four of them extend as two pronounced volutes. The volutes' ends converge and are almost connected. The basic form of the cross has thus been turned into a rustic ornament. Another parallel relief groove can be seen above the point where the upper shaft branches off. In the centre of the groove, in the middle of the capital's upper margin zone, a circular rosette can be seen. It is located in the place of a classical cantilever on the capital's abacus. The other partly preserved side contains a plant motif – a tree with leaves or fruits hanging from it (Fig. 10).



Fig. 9 Osor, block capital with cross motif. Photo by M. Jarak.

By its form, the capital can be included in the group of early medieval block capitals. These are generally small, elongated capitals with a square form. They appeared as early as in Late Antiquity, when square capitals remained their classical ornamental motifs.<sup>31</sup> The medieval specimens also often contain a

31 Cf. the block capital from Ravenna, with large acanthus leaves on the margins and with volutes in its upper part in Olivieri Farioli, "La scultura architettonica," Fig. 106.

plant motif (leaf), as can be seen, for instance, on the block capitals from Mettlach.<sup>32</sup> Some capitals are decorated with geometrical patterns only.<sup>33</sup> The small capital from Osor contains prominent individual motifs – a cross with volutes and a small tree. Both motifs had a marked symbolic meaning, which made them different from the usual plant and geometrical motifs found on most of the other similar capitals.



Fig. 10 Osor, partly preserved side of the block capital. Photo by M. Jarak.

The other capital of the same type published by B. Fučić,<sup>34</sup> with no column segment preserved, has an equally moulded lower margin part. A central protrusion can also be seen in the capital's upper marginal part. The motif on the capital consists of a few partly parallel relief grooves. Based on a photograph alone, it is hard to make a positive identification of the motif, but the

32 Meyer, *Frühmittelalterliche Kapitelle*, 272-274, 287-290.

33 Cf. the capital from Navarra with double spiral ornaments in Meyer, *Frühmittelalterliche Kapitelle*, 739.

34 Fučić, *Stara katedrala sv. Marije*, 12, Fig. 11. I did not see this capital during my visit to Osor a few years ago, and perhaps it was temporarily unavailable. I have no information about this capital at present.

similarity with the aforementioned capital is obvious, because the motif on each of them occupies the entire side.

The third capital published by Fučić is of a large size (Fig. 11). Unfortunately, it is rather damaged, with one side very worn. The capital is slightly rounded, with no abacus indicated. There is a shallow carved, very simple motif on the upper part of every side. These are linear, parallel stripes – a motif that, by its simplicity and by departing from the usual ornamental repertoire on capitals, suggests earlier dating of the monument. The same can be said for the other basic motif on the capital – the spiral.<sup>35</sup> Both spiral and linear motifs are found in small fields protruding from the capital's surface. The traces of cutting indicate that the thin upper layer of the capital's surface was chiselled off all around the square protruding fields with motifs. After the protruding fields had been obtained this way, selected motifs were carved (or – in the case of spirals – merely incised) in them. The arrangement of the fields with motifs reflects the tendency to achieve certain symmetry. The fields are relatively equally spaced-out and are positioned along the margins and in the centre of each side of the capital. This is, however, the only regularity on this very simplified early medieval capital. Based on the workmanship and motifs, its dating to the 8<sup>th</sup> century is acceptable.



Fig. 11 Osor, large, damaged capital. Photo by M. Jarak.

35 Similar motifs and similar raw workmanship are typical of the earliest medieval stonemasonry – the period preceding the early 9<sup>th</sup> century.

Another capital associated with the Church of St. Mary-at-the-Graveyard could belong to an early pre-Romanesque period. The capital is of the smooth-leaf type. Its lower part is decorated with a line of smooth leaves with their tips curled outward. A volute motif and an abacus are indicated in the upper part. The capital is medium-sized, approx. 30cm high and only fragments are preserved. In the paper in which she published it, J. Čus-Rukonić proposed its dating to the 9<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>36</sup> Such dating is acceptable given the capital's typology, and is probably supported by the context of the find because of the pre-Romanesque stone monuments associated with St. Mary's Church.

J. Čus-Rukonić published another smooth-leaf capital without specifying the site where it had been found.<sup>37</sup> This capital is somewhat taller (44.5cm) and decorated with two lines of leaves. In its upper part, quadruple-interlaced ribbons extend diagonally towards the capital's corners. This atypical detail could perhaps indicate its early pre-Romanesque origin.

Another published early medieval capital could perhaps be dated to the 9<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>38</sup> This one boasts high-precision workmanship and was produced in a high-quality workshop. Instead of the smooth leaves found on the Osor capitals described above, this one has a line of small arcades made of multiple-interlaced ribbons. The arcades are of various sizes and some of the smaller ones are inset in the bigger ones. Above this strip we can see beautifully carved volutes (small inner ones and larger outer ones), spiral-fluted corner columns and an abacus. The capital can roughly be dated to an early medieval period, but it still awaits more accurate dating.

As regards the smooth-leaf capitals, some of which were mentioned as possibly belonging to the medieval period (the Osor examples), such a typology is known elsewhere – on Košljun, for instance. Without knowing the context of the find, dating the damaged capital with smooth leaves from the Košljun collection is really difficult. The capital is adorned with broad leaves in its lower zone.

36 Čus-Rukonić, *Predromanička, protoromanička i ranoromanička skulptura*, 24.

37 Čus-Rukonić, *Predromanička, protoromanička i ranoromanička skulptura*, 49.

38 Čus-Rukonić, *Predromanička, protoromanička i ranoromanička skulptura*, 29.

## Some examples of the different dating of capitals from the early medieval churches

Consistent with the smooth-leaf capitals, very common in Europe's early medieval period, is a capital in St. Martin's (St. Barbara's) Church in Trogir. While the Croatian literature usually dates this capital to early medieval period<sup>39</sup> – the period when the church was built (which would date it to a later pre-Romanesque period) – it seems more probable that it is a Late Antiquity capital, as recent foreign literature claims.<sup>40</sup> As this capital is very similar to those typical of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>-century Lavant, it has been classified as a Lavant variant. Since other capitals from St. Barbara's Church are also reused Roman capitals, the capital with smooth leaves probably belongs to Antiquity. Unless they contain some specific pre-Romanesque details, it is hard to say which of the capitals with smooth leaves belong to Late Antiquity and which ones to an early medieval period. It is the context of finds that often enables dating of capitals. For example, when a number of such capitals can be associated with positively dated early medieval churches. The capitals with smooth leaves in Corvey, preserved in the westwork, are reliably dated to the period when the westwork was made. As regards the St. Barbara capital, since it corresponds with a late-Antiquity variant of such capitals and since the other capitals from this church are known to belong to Antiquity, its association with an early medieval church does not imply it should be dated to an early medieval period.

While it seems justified for the St. Barbara's Church capital to accept the dating from the foreign literature, there are a number of capitals which also have different datings in the Croatian and foreign literature but for which the datings proposed by the former are more acceptable. These are a few early Romanesque capitals, including the ones in St. Lawrence's Church in Zadar and in St. Nicholas' Church in Split which are still in their original places. In her synthesis on early medieval capitals in Germany, R. Meyer dates the St. Lawrence and St. Nicholas capitals, together with some other north Dalmatian specimens, to the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>41</sup> If observed separately from other early Romanesque capitals in eastern Adriatic, and without datings of the churches they are in, the said capitals can indeed be compared with some very early pre-Romanesque capitals outside Croatia. However, to all appearances, they

39 Jakšić, "Tipologija kapitela," 213; Marasović, *Dalmatia praeromanica*, 124.

40 Meyer, *Frühmittelalterliche Kapitelle*, 610.

41 Meyer, *Frühmittelalterliche Kapitelle*, 594 (Fig. 5), 613 (Fig. 6), 677 (Fig. 4), 843 (Fig. 5).



fit into the numerous group of our early Romanesque capitals, and earlier datings are not acceptable. The capitals singled out by R. Meyer can be included in the group of early Romanesque capitals with palmettes.<sup>42</sup> They are a variation within the group, characterized by more pronounced individual levels of relief and a more flexible arrangement of motifs. Particularly striking in this group of palmette capitals is the empty space underneath the volutes, which has already been noticed in literature. Another striking feature is a human figure on a capital from the St. Lawrence's Church. By its style, the small figure of an orant perfectly fits among other early Romanesque figures from the same church – a strong enough argument for dating the two palmette capitals to the period when other church furnishings and architectural decorations in the church were made.<sup>43</sup> In this regard, one detail of the decoration of the early medieval capital in St. Lawrence's – a line of small leaves covering the body of the helixes and replacing the leaf motif under helixes on Roman capitals – should be interpreted as a specific characteristic of the above-mentioned small group of early Romanesque capitals with the palmette motif. Another, more numerous group of early medieval palmette capitals in Dalmatia and Kvarner contains classical helixes without small leaves – which is also a characteristic feature of other early Romanesque capitals (with an acanthus motif) in the northern Adriatic.<sup>44</sup> We should also mention here the appearance of the spiral-fluted column with helixes growing from it in the upper part of the capital. This appearance is visible on both of the early medieval capitals in Lawrence's Church. Since parallels for this decorative detail can be found in earlier pre-Romanesque sculptures, its presence on early Romanesque capitals is not unusual.

42 When writing about the capitals from St. Lawrence's and St. Nicholas' Churches, Privlaka and Nin, Nikola Jakšić called them palmette capitals. The palmette capital group is very numerous and includes a rather large number of capitals from other sites. Cf. Jakšić, "Tipologija kapitela," 210-214. As the term "palmette capitals" has become a commonplace in Croatian expert terminology, it is justified to make a distinction between early Romanesque palmette and acanthus capitals (although this distinction is not equally common in foreign literature). For more on terminological differences for early Romanesque capitals, cf. Takács, "Ornamentale Beziehungen," 165-178.

43 Jakšić, "Tipologija kapitela," 213-214.

44 Cf. the works on early Romanesque capitals in northern Adriatic in Buchwald, "Capitelli corinzi a palmette," 178-222; Barral i Altet, "Il contributo dei capitelli," 351-357. Aquileia was the main center in the early-Romanesque capital development at the northern and eastern Adriatic. Finishing the paper with reference to Early Medieval Aquileia I would like to express my gratitude for opportunity of participation in this book devoted to professor Rajko Bratož who, among other great contributions, researched into Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages of Aquileia and neighbouring countries (e.g. Bratož, "Aquileia tra Teodosio e i Longobardi," 477-527; Bratož, "La basilica di Aquileia," 19-66).

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## Summary

The paper discusses several types of small-size capitals from the eastern Adriatic coast. The capitals are located at the Kvarner islands, Istria, and Dalmatia. They exhibit a diversity of shapes and ornamental motifs that especially characterized the stonemason production during the early pre-Romanesque period. The greater number of the discussed capitals belong to that period. A group of identical marble specimens were, however, executed at the end of Late Antiquity rather than at the beginning of the Middle Ages.

The article presents mostly a selection of published capitals. It should therefore encourage further studying of those published and unpublished capitals from our museums and depots which are not mentioned here. The insights obtained from the analysis of the presented capitals are an indication of the importance of more comprehensive studies of all the finds.